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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 JERUSALEM 000464

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TAGS: [IS](#) [KPAL](#) [KWBG](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#)  
SUBJECT: JERUSALEM MAYOR EXPLAINS "MISCOMMUNICATION" OVER  
HOME DEMOLITIONS

REF: A. JERUSALEM 385  
[B](#). JERUSALEM 337  
[C](#). JERUSALEM 161

Classified By: Consul General Jake Walles, per reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#). (C) Summary. Jerusalem Mayor Nir Barkat invited the Consul General to his office March 12 to explain the "miscommunication" over home demolitions during Secretary Clinton's March 2-4 visit. Barkat said the issuance of demolition orders during the Secretary's visit was simply a matter of "poor timing." He defended the practice of home demolitions as necessary to create order in the city, and explained again his plans to convert the Bustan area of Silwan in East Jerusalem into a park. The Consul General reiterated the USG view that demolitions and evictions are unhelpful, inconsistent with the Roadmap, and harmful to efforts to promote Israeli-Palestinian peace. End Summary.

JERUSALEM MAYOR EXPLAINS "MISCOMMUNICATION"

[2](#). (C) In a meeting at his request on March 12, Jerusalem Mayor Nir Barkat explained the "miscommunication" during the Secretary's March 2-4 visit, saying he hoped that the Municipality and the USG could communicate openly and clearly in the future. Barkat said that the press fallout from his photo opportunity with the Secretary caught him off guard. He explained that the issuance of demolition orders the day he met the Secretary was not planned. He said he signed those orders two or three weeks before, and that the public issuance on March 3 was simply a matter of "bad timing." He emphasized that he had no intention of deceiving the Secretary, and noted that his comments to her on March 3 downplaying any imminent demolitions were about Silwan, not the Ras Khamis orders that were issued that day.

[3](#). (C) The Consul General explained that the USG is concerned about home demolitions and other Israeli actions in East Jerusalem because these steps undermine the atmosphere of trust that is required for productive negotiations, and they create "facts on the ground" that complicate the effort to find a practical solution for Jerusalem as part of a permanent status arrangement. He told Mayor Barkat that home demolitions -- particularly in Silwan, but also in other areas -- and the eviction of families from Shaykh Jarrah are perceived as Israeli efforts to take over predominantly Palestinian areas in Jerusalem and prejudice a negotiated solution. The Consul General noted that the Roadmap calls on the GoI to cease demolishing homes as a punitive measure or to facilitate Israeli construction, which the Mayor said he had not known.

BARKAT DEFENDS HOME DEMOLITIONS,  
DESCRIBES PLANNED PARK FOR SILWAN

14. (C) Barkat reiterated his justification for home demolitions, saying that, as mayor, he is obligated to enforce law, order, and planning within the Jerusalem municipal boundaries. He said that he seeks ways to legalize buildings constructed on private land rather than demolishing them, but that buildings constructed on land intended for public use must be demolished for the good of the residents. The Consul General noted that the lack of town plans in East Jerusalem is a major part of the problem, and efforts should be made to develop plans that take into account the interests of the residents.

15. (C) Barkat said the Municipality is committed to creating a park in the Bustan area of Silwan, which will require the demolition of several Palestinian-owned houses. Barkat called Bustan a "strategic park" where biblical King David composed his psalms. He said the creation of the park will help draw millions of tourists to Jerusalem, and said that the city cannot tolerate illegal construction there. He said that roughly 108 houses in Bustan were built without permits. He said the Municipality needs to draft new plans for the area before converting it into a park, and assured the CG that the Municipality would proceed with those plans in a fair and publicly visible manner, and that no demolitions in the area are imminent.

BARKAT: JERUSALEM MUST REMAIN  
UNITED UNDER ISRAELI CONTROL  
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16. (C) Mayor Barkat told the CG that, in his opinion, Jerusalem must stay united to meet the needs of its residents

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and be a profitable tourist destination. He said he is committed to keeping Jerusalem united by improving the quality of life in East Jerusalem. However, he said, "illegal immigration" from the West Bank is crowding Palestinian neighborhoods and schools in Jerusalem. He said that the Palestinian birth rate in Jerusalem is higher than that of Israelis, which creates "facts on the ground" that favor the Palestinians. In response to the CG's comment that differences over Jerusalem must be addressed in permanent status negotiations, Barkat said that Jerusalem is more important to the Jews than to any other people, but he is committed to religious freedom within the Municipality.

WALLES